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ABSTRACT

Comparisons are drawn between the German "Volkshochschule" (VHS) and the American community college. After highlighting the mission of the VHS in promoting the socialization of its constituents, the paper contrasts the VHS and community college in terms of enrollment, admission, costs, programs, facilities, governance, organization, and finance. Emphasis is placed on the "open access" provided by the VHS, its low student costs (i.e., an average of $8.00 per class), its provision of special interest courses, the existence of a degree comparable to the associate degree, and the provision of funding for the VHS by federal, state, and local governments. Next, similarities and differences in the overall social objectives of the VHS and community college are considered. It is pointed out that the American community college is committed to providing a flexible, community-based educational program responsive to the needs of local business/industry and the college's individual constituents, while responding to national priorities and issues. In contrast, the VHS, although operating in a similar arena, is portrayed as having leadership objectives that are less tangible, but more social, defined in terms of societal and cultural goals. Finally, the centrality of the goal of socialization to the community college's leadership objectives is stressed, and the recognition and promotion of the socialization objective of American community colleges is urged. (HB)

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THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE AND THE VOLKSHOCHSCHULE: An International Comparison of Leadership Objectives in the Adult Teaching/Learning Process

by Quentin J. Bogart, Ph.D

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THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE AND THE VOLKSHOCHSCHULE

An International Comparison of Leadership Objectives

in the

Adult Teaching/Learning Process

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When I decided to develop this essay almost six months ago, the "germ" of today's topic was already well established in my mind. However, the problem one almost certainly faces when an idea exists and an independent conference theme pops up is--How do I grasp the theme and virtually weld it to fit the topic I wanted to talk about in the first place? That's exactly the position in which I find myself right now!

In order to achieve some degrees of unity of focus for this presentation an attempt will be made to first relate all the themes and agenda which were floating around at the conception of this paper into some sort of manageable collage. Then, a few selected comparisons can be volunteered for consideration, and, finally, we will gallop off into the sunset on the horse (or point) we originally wanted to ride!

Let's take AACJC's theme for 1985, "Community Colleges: Leaders in Teaching and Learning". Page 16 of the "convention edition" of The Community and Junior College Journal (April, 1985) proclaims the focus of this theme as being "morality", "values", and ""culture". In its lead article, Warren Bryan Martin writes about the profound changes our society and western civilization are undergoing and about the national, yea, international need to revisit these

three key societal words. Martin, in his stimulating and well-developed essay, makes a compelling plea for community colleges to help their constituent communities interpret these three terms: morality, values, and culture, in light of their reality for each locale. No problem in trying such a broad theme to the title of this paper.

Now that we have the annual AACJC "theme" placed in a reasonable prospective, we can make an "overlay" as we continue to develop our collage. For this purpose, I've selected the 1985 AACJC Public Policy Agenda which many of us received through the mail four to six weeks ago. The Agenda spotlights 11 items and presents a goal, a condition statement, and several recommendations for addressing each. The items cover the gambit from "Access/Equal Opportunity" to "Excellence in Programs/Institutions" to "Lifespan Learning/Human Resource Development" to "Trends/Service/Linkages". The Agenda calls for community colleges to work with local, state and federal levels of government in an effort to help meet the current and future needs of businesses and industries as well as serve the individual needs of citizens. Again, no problem laminating the Agenda to my title; it fits like a glove!

The final "overlay" for our collage is the personal professional "agenda" which stimulated and shaped a sabbatical leave program for me three years ago--an agenda which permitted me to visit and examine the American community college's western European counterpart, namely, the West German/Austrian volkshochschule. Harry Meinhardt in his Community College Review article (Summer, 1978) terms it, the "People's University". To be even more precise, it is literally the "people's higher school". My continuing exposure to the

volkshochschule (or VHS as it's called in Germany) during subsequent visits in 1983 and 1984, has given me a different prospective as an educator specializing in community colleges in terms of the functions and goals of our American two-year institutions.

The VHS holds central to its mission the function of promoting the "socialization" of its constituents and it has assumed a leadership role in this dimension of its function in most of the communities it serves. Hopefully, at this point, the unity of community college/volkshochschule leadership roles in developing and achieving community goals has been established.

At this juncture, a handful of selective comparisons are in order. Community College/Volkschochschule comparisons will be drawn on factors of number of institutions, enrollment, admission, cost, programs, facilities, governance, organization, and finance.

There are approximately 900 VHS in West Germany and another 200 to 250 in neighboring Austria according to Volkshochschule: Further Education/Adult Education, a pamphlet compiled by the West German Association of VHS (DVV) in 1980. Community colleges number more than 1,200 so they approximate each other in number. Both the community college and the VHS enroll well over four million participants (That's the VHS term for students.). Again, they are parallel.

The late Helmuth Dolff, Director of the Bonn based DVV, told be during an interview in June, 1982, that by law the various West German "Land" or states were committed to the support of universal, public adult education. The major vehicle to fulfill this legal pledge is the network of VHS. VHS are public centers and as such are available to all who are motivated to take part in their programs. As we all know, the community college continues to subscribe

in a similar fashion to the "open door" commitment. This ideal of open access if further promoted by both institutions in the form of low or moderate fees and tuitions. Meinhardt (1978) reported the average fee for enrolling in a VHS class to be about $8.00 (U.S.). Although this undoubtedly has increased over time, costs remain reasonable in relation to the economy as they do in the two year college in the U.S.

The two major curricular thrusts in the VHS parallel those found in the developmental and community services/non-credit areas of the community college. Developmental thrusts center around basic "German as a second language" courses for foreign "guest" workers as well as other classes aimed at culturally assimilating this large number of immigrants. Special interest courses range from art, music, drama, dance and literature to political science, philosophy, economics, history, psychology, and some science and math to home economics. Craft courses are popular. While nearly a third of its class offerings are in languages, the VHS does not attempt to parallel the program of the German university. However, it is possible for participants in some VHS to achieve the "Abitur" which is fairly similar to our Associate of Arts degree. Occupational courses, as we in the U.S. think of them, are found in very limited numbers in the VHS. These, instead are concentrated in a different type of institution called the "Berufschule".

Most VHS do not have their own buildings on campuses such as our American community college do. Rather, they tend to be "institutions without walls" renting or leasing space in other schools--frequently in conjunction with the Gymnasium (which is a sort of prep school for university bound students). A very small number of VHS have their own buildings (or haus). Where this is the case, it's usually provided by the local town or city government and it is frequently shared with the local library. This is not an entirely undesirable

arrangements because German libraries tend to attract large numbers of users and with the VHS sharing the space, these users are well exposed to its program of public lectures and classes.

For the most part, the German and Austrian VHS is operated by a public, dues paying, "association" of local citizenry. In some instances, the VHS is operated as an arm of the department of culture within the structure of city/town government. In the more frequent type of organization--the "association" form--an annually elected executive committee or board of directors governs the financial affairs of the VHS. Mayors and other visible public officials are often "ex-offico" members because they represent municipalities which provide a portion of the operating funds of the VHS. A second, larger committee or board is made up of VHS instructors, staff, other educators and citizens. This board is charged with approving the VHS program/course offerings. In certain situations, the actions of the larger "program" board take precedence over the actions and/or wishes of the smaller, more politically powerful, "finance" (or executive) board. Occasionally, "finance" or executive board member candidates are nominated by political parties.

The VHS organizational pattern closely resembles some what our American community colleges "without walls". That is, they have a full time chief executive officer, a full time finance officer, several full time department chairs who organize the classes and screen and hire instructors to teach the department's courses, and take care of other activities related to the department. Classes are almost always taught by part time instructors recruited from the community served by the VHS. In fact, one of the frequent criticisms raised by VHS officials is the lack of full time faculty and the stabilizing influence such a group of professionals can provide.

The final comparison, finance, follows closely the pattern of the American community college. Revenue to operate most VHS is provided by the federal (Bonn) government, by state (or land) government, by local governments in the VHS service area and by the participants/students. The two largest sources of support are state and local governments. The federal contribution is decreasing as it is in the U.S. and participants are often called upon to make up the difference in terms of higher class fees. Sound familiar?

Isn't it interesting to note how really closely these two postsecondary educational institutions tend to parallel each other? They were born about the same time too with the VHS taking root in Denmark and northern Germany cira 1870. But enough comparisons!--the time has come for me to saddle my steed, mount up, and make my point--if I still have one!

The stated leadership objective of the American public community college is to provide a flexible, community based, educational program which is responsive to the perceived needs of local businesses and industries as well as to the needs of its individual constituents. Community colleges, in a more generalized way, also attempt to respond to national priorities and issues as they filter into and affect each community served by such institutions.

The volkshochschule operates in a similar arena of leadership. Its leadership objectives tend to be less tangible, however, and more social than their American cousins. Community colleges appear to formally recognize and champion programmatic goals; the VHS officially publicizes itself more in terms of societal and cultural goals and objectives.

It is in this "societal" or "social" context that I propose to conclude this discussion.

Here's one leadership scenario. Karl Whyse is a young volkshochschule director at Faterstetten, a small town a dozen or so kilometers from Munich.

he is a leader in the Vabarian VHS movement and as such Whyse sees the principal task of the VHS to serve as an institution of integration and communication. In his eyes, the task of presenting learning opportunities is secondary to it.

He illustrated this VHS leadership objective to me three years ago when I spent a week with him, observing the activities of his institution by telling me about the development of his area. His story is this. Before 1967, Faterstetten was a rural community surrounded by eight other small towns and villages which had survived as cloistered little agricultural communities for eight or nine centuries. The growth of Munich and the industries supporting it occurred so speedily that, almost overnight, a rapid transit system had to be developed to carry newly recruited workers from these rural communities to their jobs in the city and back again. Also, the Olympic Games and its associated events required the establishment of a network of rapid surface and subway routes. Sleepy little farming villages exploded like hot kernals of popcorn as the mass transit system's tentacles reached farther and farther into the Bavarian countryside. In 10 years Faterstetten grew from 4,500 to 18,000 residents. The population of its sister villages doubled, then tripled. Large blocks of condominiums and high rise apartments covered the pastoral landscape. These ancient cultures were invaded by the white collar, BMW and Mercedes wheeling communters with working wives or live-in girlfriends. Within this society in flux, Karl Whyse sees the leadership objective of his VHS as one of helping the youthful and middle-aged newcomer to appreciate the age-old traditions and values of the farmers while assisting the farmers to understand the changes in society taking place so quickly all around them--continually introducing, explaining, integrating--establishing new or modified lines of communication between city and country.

A second VHS leadership scenario was shared with me a week later by Dr. Wilhelm Mallmann, a seasoned VHS director in the beautiful Austrian city of Salzburg 100 kilometers to the east. Mallmann's VHS serves an urban/rural population of 250,000 at the gateway to the Austrian Alps. To quote Mallmann, "Volkshochschulen," Mallmann said, "are not only institutions where people can go and learn, but also where people all become friends. They go off together; they drink coffee and sip wine together. They use the VHS as a sort of social meeting place!" End quote. To him the VHS is a great social center for newcomers. Not many Americans know, Mallmann went on to say, that after the end of World War II all the German speaking populations format he so called secessionist states of the former Austrian-Hungarian--Empire--Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, and Romaina--were expelled. They had to go somewhere and many settled in Austria, and several thousand in Salzburg. These people according to Mallmann, were glad to come to the volkshochschule to learn something. The volkshochschule literally helped them to create a new existence for themselves--to pick up and rebuild their lives.

These two scenarios not only provide a basis for the point of this entire discourse--they are, in fact, the very essence of the point. It occurs to me that in the entire kaleidoscope of formalized collections of community college goals and themes and the agenda that order them, there exists one leadership objective which is continually achieved, but which we fail to publicly proclaim and promote--one which has dignity and value and which is so closely tied to the life words of "morality", "values", and "culture". It's the community college's leadership objective of <u>socialization</u>!

<u>Socialization</u>, the communication among and integration of people, rests at the very heart of the human relationships our community colleges most inescapably foster. With the demise of the American family as a social unit,

the community colleges role in socialization becomes critical. My plea, then, is for the recognition and promotion of the socialization objective of the American community college. We need to encourage the Parnell's, the Eaton's, the Phelp's, the Cohen's, the Cardenas's, the LeCroy's, and the Elsners to seize the community college's understated leadership objective of "socialization" and proclaim its importance to the politicians, to the board members, to the captains of business and industry, to the taxpayers, to the majorities, and to the minorities because this objective truly represents our institution's quiet effort to encourage "man's humanity to man"!

Helmuth Dolff summed it up best when he said,

"Education and culture are an indispensable element of local community development. Within the framework of the many cultural and educational activities supported by local authorities, Volkshochschulen contribute to the social, intellectual and cultural development of the general public. They provide essential knowledge and skills; they encourage insights and attitudes by means of which the community gains more active and more responsible members."

--And having belabored my point far too long, I spur my horse and gallop off into the sunset!

ADDENDUM

Three Questions for Discussion

1. Should the community college spotlight and promote its socialization leadership objective?
2. If so, how can it best be promoted and what groups should be targeted for this promotion?

3. If not, what leadership objectives should be promoted and how should they be prioritized?

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